



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 116th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 165

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2019

No. 186

Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Listen to our prayers, Almighty God. Let not our Nation be ashamed. You are our mighty rock and fortress. Lead and guide us, enabling us to honor Your Name. Protect our lawmakers from the hidden traps that can derail freedom. Remind them that the truth alone will make us free. Show Yourself strong even to those who strive to save themselves. Manifest Your might to all. May our Senators trust You, seek Your wisdom, and obey Your precepts. We pray in Your mighty Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRAMER). The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for 1 minute.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FAMILY FIRST PREVENTION SERVICES ACT

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, in recent years, the opioid epidemic has resulted in steadily climbing numbers of kids entering foster care.

However, in 2018, the number of children in foster care has declined for the first time since 2011. This is evidence that prevention programs are working.

It is important this renewed focus on prevention continues as all 50 States

work to implement the Family First Prevention Services Act. When child welfare agencies have more tools, which they will have through this new legislation, to help families before children must be removed, outcomes are better for communities, better for parents, and, more importantly, better for the children we are trying to protect.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

HONG KONG HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY ACT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday the U.S. Senate spoke up forcefully and clearly for the brave people of Hong Kong. We unanimously passed the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act.

As the author of the original United States-Hong Kong Policy Act of 1992, and somebody who has advocated for Hongkongers for decades, I was proud to speak out on this back in the summer when the protests began. I was also proud to secure important policy steps for Hong Kong in the Senate Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs back in September.

I am also proud that Senators approved these further steps to update the original law to preserve Hong Kong's autonomy and democracy and provide more tools for holding Beijing accountable.

I want to thank the senior Senator from Florida, all the other Members who led on this issue, and all of our colleagues for securing unanimous passage.

While this bill moves forward, it is also important for the executive branch and our allies and partners around the world to fulfill their roles as well. Even before this new bill becomes law, Congress has already given the administration significant powers to act, including authorities to directly sanction individuals who violate human rights. I urge every trading nation around the world to look clearly at Hong Kong and at Xinjiang and imagine the costs as China continues to entrench its surveillance state and export it all around the world.

The Senate continues to do our part. Everyone else must do theirs as well. The United States and the world must stand with Hong Kong.

UNITED STATES-MEXICO-CANADA AGREEMENT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter, earlier this week, I got to attend the Kentucky Electric Cooperative's annual meeting. The group represents 26 co-ops across Kentucky, particularly in rural communities.

We talked about the positive trends for what you might call Middle America over the past several years—the nascent economic turnaround in small towns, small cities, farm country, rural America, and other places the Obama economy largely left behind.

We also talked about the work still ahead. One of the major priorities that Kentuckians mentioned is the USMCA. I have heard it from our farmers, manufacturers, logistics providers, and bourbon distillers. Almost every sector of our economy would benefit from this trade deal.

Together, Canada and Mexico make up a \$500 billion export market for the United States. This major update to

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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our trading framework with our neighbors would send that number even higher, generate more wealth here at home, and create an estimated 176,000 new American jobs.

It is no wonder that so many Kentuckians and so many people around the country want Washington to get it done. I hear from everybody, from family farming operations to midsize manufacturers, to Fortune 500 firms, such as UPS and Toyota, that employ thousands and thousands in my State. All of them want this fairer, better playing field in trade with Canada and Mexico.

In a little more than a week from now, it will have been a full year since President Trump signed the draft agreement along with the leaders of Canada and Mexico—1 full year—but for months now, this generational agreement has been sitting on ice over in the House of Representatives. Speaker PELOSI has refused to allow a vote.

In public, House Democrats insist and insist that they care about more things than simply impeaching the President. They insist that they want to work together and legislate, but actions speak louder than words, and apparently, thus far, House Democrats have preferred to block 176,000 new jobs for American workers rather than put impeachment aside and get along with the White House for 5 minutes. It appears there is no governing priority—no matter how bipartisan, no matter how beneficial to American families—that will not take a backseat to impeachment.

Month after month, every time she has been asked about this subject, the Speaker of the House has offered the same empty rhetoric. She is always close to allowing the vote. Her conference is always “almost there, almost there,” but we have been almost there for months and months with no outcome in sight. Lots of talk but zero results.

Back in February, the Speaker was asked about the USMCA. She said, “I’m optimistic.” That was last February.

We heard the same thing in May and in June. “We want to pass this bill.” We heard the same thing through the summer and in September and in October. “Every day we’re becoming closer,” she said. A few weeks ago the Speaker said: “I think we are close . . . the last mile,” and she called this “the easiest trade deal that we’ve ever done.” A few days ago, the Speaker insisted, yet again, a vote was “imminent.” That was a few days ago.

This has been the House Democrats’ wild goose chase. This is what our American families, American job creators, and our partners in Mexico and Canada have had to put up with. Every time the Trump administration meets the Speaker halfway, she tries to move the goal post another 10 yards. She literally has not even updated her own talking points since Valentine’s Day—textbook obstruction.

Just in case anybody did not yet understand that the real roadblock here is partisan politics, I understand the Speaker hosted Richard Trumka yesterday, head of the AFL-CIO, a power player in leftwing Big Labor. He came to the Capitol to quell the uprising of the Democrats’ own Members who can’t believe this thing still hasn’t passed. How ironic. We are talking about a trade deal that would create more American jobs, and Democrats are considering outsourcing their judgment to Big Labor special interests, who, to my recollection, have not supported a single major trade deal in living memory.

Let’s get this straight. It sounds like the head of the AFL-CIO—an organization that has never supported any trade agreement—is now the guy who gives the go-ahead on USMCA? We are talking about a trade deal, and Democrats are considering outsourcing their own jobs to the head of AFL-CIO—really? I wish I were making this up.

Reporters got ahold of the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee yesterday, and he literally said the deal would move forward “if we can get Richard Trumka to agree.” So the head of the AFL-CIO—an organization that has never supported a trade agreement—is now the guy who has to green-light the USMCA, which would create 176,000 American jobs. No wonder they have a problem in the House. The chairman of the Ways and Means Committee literally said that this major trade agreement will move forward only if this major Democratic campaign contributor gives them permission.

Well, it appears that even some House Democrats are getting fed up with the absurdity. Here is what one of them said yesterday:

[Trumka] still says we’re at the five yard line. . . . So it feels like we’ve been at the five yard line for a while.

No kidding. This is the biggest opportunity the House Democrats have had in the entirety of their first year in power to do something significant and substantive for American families—to actually pass something new and real that can become law and strengthen our Nation. In other words, the USMCA is House Democrats’ final exam for their whole first year in power. And unless something turns around very quickly, after nearly a year of happy talk and empty promises, their leadership seems determined to flunk that exam. All impeachment, all the time—and even the most obvious win for American workers and small businesses gets blocked. That will be Democrats’ progress report if USMCA goes nowhere. Obviously, I hope that is not how this story ends.

Mexico has passed it. Canada is waiting on us. I believe a bipartisan majority of the Senate is ready to pass it. Our workers, our job creators, and our neighbors are just waiting on Speaker PELOSI. This is no time to kill a national victory out of political spite.

This is no time to outsource your judgment to special interests. The Speaker should allow a vote, and the House should send us the USMCA.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Barbara Lagoa, of Florida, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Eleventh Circuit.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, with government funding set to expire tomorrow, the House of Representatives passed a continuing resolution yesterday to fund the government through December 20. It is now up to the Senate to pass the continuing resolution without much fuss and send it to the President’s desk before the deadline.

As the Republican leader and I work to set the time for that vote, we must look ahead. The continuing resolution will give appropriators additional time to get a bipartisan appropriations process back on track before the end of the year. The Senate has been able to process several noncontroversial appropriations bills, bipartisan, but several more can’t move forward until the Democrats and the Republicans both all agree on the allocations. You can’t do it with one party. That leads to trouble. In recent days, we have made some progress, and I hope the talks between both sets of appropriators—House and Senate, Democratic and Republican—will continue in good faith and in earnest after we finish the continuing resolution.

At the same time, there are several very important issues the Democrats are trying to address in the continuing